Choosing and judging teachers

What Heads and student teachers think matters

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Teachers can make a difference, so the recruitment literature tells us (TTA, n.d.). Not unreasonably, head teachers want such teachers. To be more exact, they want teachers who use ways and make differences that the head teachers think are appropriate. What do they look for in a teacher? Do student teachers think the same way? This study compares some head teachers' and student teachers' views of what counts when selecting and judging a new teacher. The extent to which they agree could determine a student teacher's employment prospects. The views may also inform the practices of student trainers, who are, in part, judged on the success of their students in finding employment and in performing acceptably in it.

There have been well over 10,000 studies of what makes a teacher effective. They point to the value of, for instance, clarity of exposition, enthusiasm and questioning skills (Rosenshine and Furst, 1973; Schuell, 1996). Surveys by school inspectors in England and Wales show that the effectiveness of a new teacher is often judged by the quality of, for instance, class management, planning, subject knowledge, enthusiasm, appearance and flexibility (DES, 1988; OfStEd, 1993, 1995). These cannot, however, provide a once-and-forever list of the attributes of the effective teacher, nor can teacher selection be based on the mechanical application of a checklist of attributes. Teaching is too complex for that, and, in any case, what counts as an appropriate attribute changes with views of teaching and learning, expectations, people and contexts. Some attributes, however, may be expressed at a level of generality that accommodates diverse views and values. For example, one such may be the ability to control a class of children. Head teachers have probably considered this to be important for decades although, at a more specific level, they would disagree on what it means. Other attributes may have no meaning at other times. For example, the ability to use electronic information and communication technologies (ICT) to support learning could not be more than a recent desideratum.

Although student teachers may be novices, their conceptions of what counts in teaching could be well founded. They will have experienced a variety of teachers during their own schooling and, by the end of their training, will usually have taught in more than one school and been guided towards certain

classroom behaviours. We may expect, therefore, student teachers' concerns to overlap those of practised teachers but skills that the latter take for granted could feature strongly in the novice's mind. The expert, on the other hand, may simply use such skills while valuing others more. For instance, a student teacher may value highly the ability to move a class between different tasks in a controlled way. An expert might feel such skills are the background for more important matters. While the management of movement is necessary (and may have reached the level of automaticity for the expert), it is the quality of the teaching that determines the outcome. Head teachers have usually had a fairly successful teaching career and are likely to be one of the latter. They are likely to have worked with new teachers and have expectations that acknowledge their limited teaching experience.

At an interview a significant mismatch between student teachers' conceptions and those of head teachers could lose them a job. Further, at the end of their first year of teaching, new teachers are measured against induction standards set by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) and resembling those set for teacher training. These focus on Knowledge and Understanding of subjects to be taught, Planning, Teaching and Class Management, Monitoring, Assessment, Recording, Reporting and Accountability (DfEE, 1998). They allow room for interpretation and, again, the head teachers' conceptions of what matters are likely to be important. Selecting a new teacher and judging his or her effectiveness are not, of course, the same thing. Attributes that enable an applicant to obtain a teaching post may not be entirely the same or be given the same weight in judging teaching performance.

In the United States, Johnson compiled lists of criteria for selecting a teacher and for judging a teacher's effectiveness, drawing on some sixty teacher effectiveness sources and criteria commonly used in 'teacher hiring' (Oliver, 1982; Jensen, 1987; Johnson *et al.*, 1992; Johnson, 1994). He asked secondary school principals to rate them for importance. His analysis revealed five clusters that were more or less relevant when selecting a teacher. These were criteria relating to *communication*, *credentials*, *experience, presentation* ('appearance' and 'résumé') and *activities* (such as evidence of 'leadership'). Similarly, for teacher effectiveness, he found four clusters: *interaction skills*, *discipline*, *preparation* and *activation* (the ability to motivate and involve learners).

In 1999 Johnson and Roellke went on to survey secondary school teachers and undergraduate education faculty members (teacher educators) to identify what criteria they rated most important for obtaining employment as a secondary school teacher and for effective classroom teaching. The surveys were based on the earlier one compiled by Johnson (1994), and each comprised a list of criteria to be rated on a 1–9 Likert-type scale.

Taking the 1994 and 1999 studies together, those tested rated enthusiasm, interpersonal communication and oral communication as being particularly important for selecting a teacher (each being scored at over 8 out of 9, on average). All rated appearance between 6 and 7. For principals and teachers the college attended was low on the list (scoring 4·7 and 4·8, respectively). Educators rated it more highly, at 5·7, on average.

Regarding criteria that may indicate the effectiveness of a teacher, preparation (for class) was highly rated by all three groups (scoring over 8 out of 9, on average). Teachers and principals also rated enthusiasm and ability to motivate similarly. ICT skills did not appear in the earlier list rated by principals but were added to the later surveys. They were seen as the least important by both teachers and teacher educators in the United States, although still scoring between 6 and 7 out of nine, on average.

Johnson and Roellke concluded that the skills required to obtain a teaching post were not quite the same as those needed for effective teaching. They also felt that increasing the role of communication skills in teacher training courses would be welcomed. Knowing some features of student teachers' and head teachers' conceptions of what matters could help both groups understand one another better and it could help teacher trainers prepare students better for employment.

The aim of this study was to determine how student teachers and head teachers rated a variety of attributes that may be considered relevant at interview and when appraising new teachers working in the primary school. The objectives were to answer the following questions:

1 What do student teachers and head teachers consider to be important at interview?
2 To what extent do they agree on what is important?
3 What do student teachers and head teachers consider to be important when judging the effectiveness of a new teacher?
4 To what extent do these agree on what is important, and how do their views relate to external criteria?
5 How do these relate to the North American findings, described above?
6 Are there indications of overlooked knowledge and skills that might be worthy of attention in teacher training?

Method

Instrument

To allow some comparison with the findings of Johnson and Roellke, their survey instruments were adapted to suit the educational context and language in England. Many of their items could be used without modification (such as 'Enthusiasm', 'Appearance', 'Listening skills' and 'Writing skills'). Others needed rewording to match England and Wales terminology (for example, 'Computer/technology-related skills' became 'ICT-related skills', 'Competence in area of specialisation' became 'Competence in a NC area of specialism' and 'Résumé' became 'Curriculum vitae'.) The course requirements for the students surveyed limited opportunities for 'Participation in campus/community activities' and 'Leadership in campus/community activities' in the selection of a teacher survey, so these items were omitted. Each item was to be rated on a scale from 1 to 9, according to its perceived importance, 9 representing the greatest importance. It is possible that student teachers and head

teachers in England will consider other attributes important, so an opportunity was provided to add these in each survey. The adapted lists appear in the appendix.

Procedure and participants

Primary school head teachers taking students for practice placements from two universities in the north-east of England were asked to complete the surveys when they attended unrelated briefing sessions at the universities. All in attendance (sixty-six) did so. Postgraduate students training to teach in primary school at these universities also completed the surveys near the end of their courses. Postgraduate teacher training courses in England are closely prescribed by the TTA and place very significant demands on the student teachers, particularly in terms of demands on their time. All in attendance (eighty-one) did so. In both cases the surveys were completed and returned immediately. They took about fifteen minutes to complete.

Results

Selecting a newly qualified teacher

Primary student teachers' responses. The primary student teachers rated 'Enthusiasm' highest, scoring it at an average of 8·6 out of 9. This was closely followed by 'Interpersonal communication', with a mean score of 8·4, 'Oral communication skills', scoring 8·3, and 'Listening skills', scoring 7.79. In other words, attributes that Johnson (1994) would describe as relating to *communication* were considered the most important. They were followed by *credentials* such as 'References' and 'Competence in a National Curriculum area of specialism' (with average scores of 7·54 and 7·19, respectively). Other items relating to credentials, 'Standard of degree' and 'Place of training', were scored lower (5·50 and 5·12, respectively) and appeared fourteenth and sixteenth out of the eighteen items in the list. Table 1 supplies the full list.

Primary head teachers' responses. Like the student teachers, the head teachers considered matters of *communication* to be the most important, followed by *credentials* like 'References' and 'Competence in a National Curriculum area of specialism'. Again, 'Standard of degree' and 'Place of training' appeared in the fourteenth and sixteenth positions, respectively. Table 1 supplies the full list.

There is a high level of agreement between the two lists (Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient is 0·97, $p<0·00005$). In other words, the student teachers and the primary head teachers tend to agree on what counts at interview. There was, however, a tendency for the primary head teachers to give many of the items a little more importance than the student teachers did. This could be the case even when an item in the head teachers' list appeared lower than it did in the student-teachers' list. For example, 'Appearance' and 'ICT-related skills' appears slightly lower in the head teachers' list. Nevertheless,

Table 1 Primary student teachers' and head teachers' responses to the 'Selecting a newly qualified teacher at interview' survey

Primary student teachers' responses			*Primary head teachers' responses*		
Enthusiasm	8·59	(0·77)	Enthusiasm	8·80	(0·44)*
Interpersonal communication	8·36	(0·83)	Interpersonal communication	8·62	(0·63)*
Oral communication skills	8·27	(0·94)	Oral communication skills	8·50	(0·79)
Listening skills	7·79	(1·03)	Listening skills	8·24	(0·96)*
References	7·54	(1·20)	References	8·01	(1·13)*
Writing skills	7·28	(1·10)	Writing skills	7·94	(1·15)*
Competence in NC specialism	7·19	(1·07)	Competence in NC specialism	7·68	(1·22)*
Appearance	6·84	(1·34)	Curriculum vitae	7·27	(1·12)*
ICT-related skills	6·84	(1·36)	Portfolio evidence of skills	7·27	(1·43)*
Portfolio evidence of skills	6·59	(1·60)	Appearance	7·21	(1·62)*
Curriculum vitae	6·43	(1·35)	ICT-related skills	7·21	(1·25)*
Poise	6·14	(1·54)	Coursework grades	6·73	(1·41)*
Standard of degree	5·50	(1·40)	Standard of degree	6·36	(1·55)*
Coursework grades	5·37	(1·62)	Poise	6·29	(1·57)
Place of training	5·12	(1·90)	Place of training	5·53	(1·58)
Work experience, unrelated	5·11	(1·94)	Work experience, unrelated	4·80	(1·82)
Vacation/part-time employment	4·00	(1·76)	Vacation/part-time employment	3·73	(2·22)

Notes Mean scores on a scale of 1–9, with standard devlations in brackets. The larger the mean score the greater the importance attached to that item, in general. * Items scored significantly higher by the head teachers, using the z test as an approximate indicator, $p<0·05$.

the head teachers' average score for these items was 7.21, compared with that of the student teachers, 6.84.

Judging the effectiveness of a new teacher

Primary student teachers' responses. Attributes that Johnson (1994) associated with *activation* were rated most important ('Ability to motivate children', mean score 8·62, and 'Ability to involve children', mean score 8.51). Generally his *interaction skills* were also rated relatively high (for instance, 'Enthusiasm', 'Oral communication' and 'Interpersonal communication skills'). 'Classroom control', relating to what Johnson describes as *discipline*, is also relatively high on the list, scoring 8·15 on average. 'Discipline skills', however, appear much further down, with an average score of 7·74. *Preparation,* represented by 'Planning/preparation for teaching', appeared about half-way down (scoring 7·95). At the end of their list there were 'ICT-related skills' (6·59) and 'Appearance' (6·20). Table 2 supplies the full list.

Primary head teachers' responses. Like the students, the head teachers identified items to do with *activation* as most important ('Ability to motivate children', mean score 8.81, and 'Ability to involve children', mean score 8.80). 'Classroom control' and 'Discipline skills' (associated with *discipline*), however, appeared higher in their list and closer together. They were followed by a mix relating to *interaction skills* and *preparation*. Once again, 'ICT-related skills' and 'Appearance' were at the end. Table 2 supplies the full list.

Table 2 Primary student teachers' and head teachers' responses to the 'Judging the effectiveness of a teacher' survey

Primary student teachers' responses			*Primary head teachers' responses*		
Ability to motivate children	8·62	(0·56)	Ability to motivate children	8·81	(0·47)*
Ability to involve children	8·51	(0·74)	Ability to involve children	8·80	(0·57)*
Enthusiasm	8·47	(0·79)	Classroom control	8·73	(0·51)*
Creating a positive climate	8·36	(0·81)	Creating a positive climate	8·66	(0·60)*
Oral communication	8·23	(0·79)	Discipline skills	8·64	(0·65)*
Classroom control	8·15	(0·82)	Enthusiasm	8·61	(0·77)
Interpersonal communication skills	8·12	(0·76)	Oral communication	8·59	(0·75)*
Listening skills	8·08	(1·04)	Planning/preparation	8·45	(0·83)*
Clarity	8·05	(0·91)	Questioning skills	8·38	(0·72)*
Planning/preparation	7·95	(1·04)	Interpersonal communication skills	8·31	(0·77)
Questioning skills	7·94	(0·91)	Listening skills	8·25	(1·04)
Ability to adapt to individuals	7·86	(0·98)	Evaluation of children skills	8·19	(0·91)*
Flexibility	7·85	(1·00)	Clarity	8·19	(0·89)
Evaluation of children skills	7·84	(1·07)	Flexibility	7·92	(1·10)
Discipline skills	7·74	(1·01)	Ability to adapt to individuals	7·78	(1·00)
Competence in area of specialism	7·06	(1·26)	Writing skills	7·56	(1·22)*
Writing skills	6·94	(1·34)	Competence in area of specialism	7·56	(1·30)*
ICT-related skills	6·59	(1·34)	ICT-related skills	7·23	(1·27)*
Appearance	6·20	(1·52)	Appearance	6·84	(1.57)*

Notes Mean scores on a scale of 1–9, with standard devlations in brackets. The larger the mean score the greater the importance attached to that item, in general. * Items scored significantly higher by the head teachers, using the z test as an approximate indicator, $p<0·05$.

The agreement between student teachers' and head teachers' lists was less than before but still relatively high (Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient is 0·85, $p<0·0002$). There was still a tendency for the primary head teachers to give many of the items a little more importance than the student teachers.

The relation to North American findings

The surveys that Johnson and Roellke (1999) used in the United States were adapted for use in England. This means that the two pairs of surveys may not look at quite the same things. For instance, what 'ICT-related skills' means to head teachers in England is unlikely to be exactly the same as what 'Computer/technology-related skills' means to school principals in the United States. Even had no changes been made in the words, the contexts are different, so the same item may be interpreted differently. At the same time Johnson and Roellke focused on the secondary school work while this study is of views relating to the primary school. Bearing in mind these differences, there is general agreement between the various survey results. (Tables 3 and 4 summarise the correlations.) This suggests that, at a general level, what is considered to be important in selecting and judging a teacher in the United States and in England is similar.

Table 3 Selecting a newly qualified teacher at interview: rank order correlation coefficients relating English and US contexts

	England	
USA	*Student teachers*	*Head teachers*
Principals	0·90[b]	0·86[b]
Teachers	0·85[b]	0·81[b]
Teacher educators	0·87[b]	0·82[b]

Notes 'ICT-related skills' was omitted in correlating the English data and the US principals' data, as the latter did not include a similar item. The nearer the coefficient is to 1 the greater the agreement in rankings of items in the surveys; [b] indicates $p<0{\cdot}001$.

Table 4 Judging the effectiveness of a teacher: rank order correlation coefficients relating English and US contexts

	England	
USA	*Student teachers*	*Head teachers*
Principals	0·75[a]	0·70[a]
Teachers	0·71[a]	0·78[b]
Teacher educators	0·79[b]	0·61[a]

Notes The nearer the coefficient is to 1 the greater the agreement in rankings of items in the surveys; [a] indicates $p<0{\cdot}01$, [b] indicates $p<0{\cdot}001$.

The opportunity to add additional items to the lists was rarely taken either by student teachers or by head teachers. None of the additions occurred more than once.

Discussion and conclusions

Johnson's lists of attributes was drawn from the research literature on teacher effectiveness and from criteria collected from school principals in an earlier study (Johnson *et al.*, 1992). In practice, head teachers and student teachers may value other or additional attributes. When completing those used here they had the opportunity to add extra desiderata to the list but additions were very rare. Further, the ones provided were generally highly rated. This suggests that the lists included what the groups think is important but there could be other attributes that they were unwilling to state or were unconscious of. The data, therefore, indicate expressed values.

To that extent, these head teachers and student teachers considered various communication skills to be particularly important when selecting a newly qualified teacher. Effective communication skills are likely to be useful in the classroom (and in an interview). For example, the expression of enthusiasm, often involving non-verbal communication, can stimulate interest and elicit compliance in others (Neill and Caswell, 1993). This can make a teacher's

enthusiasm a valued attribute. Good communication skills probably need to be backed by at least satisfactory credentials. The reference was generally the most important of these. Standard of degree and coursework grades were rated significantly lower in importance (z tests, $p<0.0001$), perhaps because they do not relate directly to classroom behaviour. The place of training was considered of less importance still. All teacher training providers in higher education must adhere to the requirements of the TTA's National Curriculum for Teacher Training. This probably gives some consistency to the new teacher's training across such institutions. However, universities often have a reputation that might be expected to influence the selection of a teacher. There is an indication that this consideration does not figure greatly in head teachers' criteria or, perhaps, their conscious thoughts. The student teachers tested here were generally in tune with the head teachers' priorities although the latter tended to give a little more weight to many of the items than the student teachers. There was a risk that some of the student teachers might underplay attributes that a head teacher would value, even though they agreed about their relative importance.

When judging the effectiveness of a new teacher, head teachers and student teachers both considered activation skills (the ability to motivate and involve children) to be particularly important. For the head teachers, classroom control and discipline skills came hard on the heels of activation skills. Perhaps surprisingly, the scores given to these items by the student teachers separated them by some distance, so that 'discipline skills' appear much further down the list. Perhaps, in these student teachers' experience, significant disciplinary matters were dealt with by others or the student teachers had been shielded from very difficult children. Interaction skills were also generally valued by both groups. Various governments have put some emphasis on the development of a computer-literate society and on its appearance in schools but here ICT-related skills are among the least important items. Moseley and Higgins (1999) found that it is not the presence of ICT skills that determines the quality of the teaching but the qualities of the teacher that determine whether ICT is used to good effect. In other words, other attributes and skills matter more, and that is what seems to be reflected in the rankings of the items. The same argument may apply to competence in a particular subject offered as a specialism. What matters first in the primary school seems to be a broad curricular expertise (DES, 1988). Student teachers and head teachers were in broad agreement about the relative importance of many of the items, although, once again, head teachers tended to give many of them more weight. A concern could be the significantly lower score these student teachers gave, on average, to discipline skills (z test, $p<0{\cdot}0001$). They do, of course, have the induction year in which to fine-tune their grasp of what counts.

Taken together, this points to the high value given to communication and interaction skills in teaching. The skills valued particularly seem to be those relating to verbal and non-verbal communication. Enthusiasm, for instance, was generally rated high, and experiments in the United States have shown

that the expression of enthusiasm by a teacher can elicit attention and produce greater achievement among the learners. More than that, teachers can be trained to express enthusiasm and so increase the likelihood that they will have these positive effects (Bettencourt *et al.*, 1983). The TTA's Standards for the Award of Qualified Teacher Status require student teachers to keep pupils engaged by being enthusiastic, presenting information clearly, questioning effectively and listening carefully (DfEE, 1998). The TTA, however, does not seem to see these as parts of a coherent whole. The subject could benefit from more systematic treatment that provided students with the mental structure to guide their practice, suggest alternatives and develop skills. Communication and interaction skills are fairly generic and can be applied with slight modifications across the curriculum. Nevertheless, they should be practised in particular contexts to ensure that students develop the habit of applying them in all subjects, including those furthest from their personal interest. Such a structure might usefully incorporate other aspects of communication, such as communicating with text, pictures, tables and numbers, and could extend to include the appraisal of such material as work cards, textbooks, video-tapes and software.

The data were supplied by head teachers and student teachers in the north-east of England. The level of agreement with principals', teachers' and trainers' views in the United States, however, strongly suggests that broadly similar views may not be unusual and are likely to be found elsewhere in England. Further, DES (1988) and OfStEd (1993, 1995) surveys point to criteria for assessing new teachers being used that are similar to those listed here. Nevertheless, it does not mean that, at a more specific level, the match would still be there. For instance, many may agree on the importance of class control yet disagree on the ways of maintaining such control. It would be interesting and potentially of value to identitfy any such disagreements by interviewing representative samples of student teachers and head teachers to collect and compare the meanings they attach to the listed attributes. Of course, just because head teachers favour particular attributes when selecting and judging teachers it does not mean that such weightings are appropriate. They are, however, based on experience and, right or wrong, knowing what head teachers think is of practical value to a newly qualified teacher.

Appendix

Selecting a newly qualified teacher at interview

Please rate each of the following according to the degree of importance you would give it in selecting a newly qualified teacher at interview. 1= lesser importance end of the scale, 9 = greater importance end of the scale.

	lesser importance	*greater importance*
Vacation/part-time employment	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Standard of degree	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Listening skills	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Writing skills	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Career Entry Profile	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Enthusiasm	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Interpersonal communication	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Coursework assignment grades	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
References	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Curriculum vitae	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Appearance	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
ICT-related skills	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Work experience, unrelated to course	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Oral communication skills	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Competence in a NC area of specialism	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Poise	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Portfolio of evidence of teaching skills	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Place of training	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Any others?		
… … … … … … … … … … … …	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
… … … … … … … … … … … …	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	

Judging the effectiveness of a teacher

Please rate each of the following according to the degree of importance you would give it in judging the effectiveness of a teacher. 1= lesser importance end of the scale, 9 = greater importance end of the scale.

	lesser importance	*greater importance*
Oral communication (speaking skills)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Discipline skills	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Enthusiasm	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Creating a positive climate	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Flexibility	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
ICT-related skills	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Appearance	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Interpersonal communication skills	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Ability to involve children	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Classroom control	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Clarity	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Questioning skills	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Evaluation of children's skills	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Listening skills	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Competence in area of specialism	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	

	lesser importance	*greater importance*
Ability to adapt to individuals	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Writing skills	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Planning/preparation for teaching	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Ability to motivate children	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
Any others?		
… … … … … … … … … … … …	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	
… … … … … … … … … … … …	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	

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